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Introduction:

It is truly an honor for the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art (SECCA) to be able to exhibit the work of long-time Winston-Salem resident Martha Dunigan. Dunigan, who passed away in June 2001 after a 10-month illness, was one of the city's most cherished artists and an integral part of the arts community. Martha was a very serious artist whose extensive body of work over the years ranged from her highly detailed woodcuts to her large sculptures, often referencing boat and house forms and frequently incorporating found or natural materials. Not only was Martha an artist of significant note, she was a gifted teacher who did so much to ground and challenge her many students over the years.

Martha's presence among those who knew her will continue to be greatly missed. We are indeed all fortunate that so much of her work continues to live on as a touchstone for her creativity and vitality.

We are particularly indebted to Martha's family for allowing SECCA to mount this exhibition of her work. In particular, our thanks go to Breon Dunigan and Bob Bailey for their assistance with locating and securing numerous works. I would also like to thank Doug Bohr, SECCA's Associate Curator, for his tireless efforts in organizing *Martha Dunigan: Passage*. He has very sensitively organized an exhibition that reveals the many chapters in Martha's life and career and that demonstrates to us all what an accomplished artist Martha truly was.

Vicki Kopf
Executive Director

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Martha Dunigan *Passage*

Martha Dunigan:

It would be hard to find a more consummate artist than Martha Dunigan. Over a long and close friendship of many years in which I had the opportunity to observe Martha, I do not think there was a single day in which she was not doing something related to her art - making drawings, firing a kiln (leaving the party to go fire the kiln "I'll be back in half an hour"), or just walking the beach and with her unfailing eye gathering those neglected bits of bleached wood or bones that would be magically transformed in her sculptures. Perhaps it was in her genes. Her parents and her grandparents were artists, and fortunately this has been passed along in her own children and probably for generations to come.

Any who know Martha's work know that the variety is astonishing - from charcoal drawings, both abstract and realistic, to woodcuts and book illustrations; from those small and witty ceramic animal tiles to larger earthenware forms; from collages of handmade paper and bones to large-scale sculpture made of sticks and tar. Despite living most of her adult life in Piedmont North Carolina, Martha - who grew up in Provincetown, Massachusetts and later spent her summers in her beloved Jonesport, Maine - felt a strong kinship with the sea, and especially with the shoreline, the receptacle of those sea-borne treasures that found their way into her art in a rich and personal metaphorical language. Over the years Martha's work grew both in scale and in the breadth and ambition of its message. But she always remained true to her craft. One of the hallmarks of Martha's work was her sensitivity to materials. Martha was close to nature and preferred natural materials, which she always manipulated with the sureness of her finely developed craft skills and the sensitivity of her own distinct and personal touch. Perhaps one of Martha's greatest contributions was in her breaking down of any remaining barriers between craft and fine art. For Martha there was no distinction between the two. Nor was there any separation between her art and her life. Martha lived every moment as an artist. Anyone who met Martha was moved by her warmth and humanity. Fortunately, at least a small part of that lives on in her work that can be seen in this exhibition.

Bob Knott

Message: Two Voices, 1996, string, wood, rock, fabric, clay, 12 X 16 X 10 inches,
courtesy of the Martha Dunigan Estate

cover: (detail) **Parable,** 1993, tar, wax, string, wood, 67 X 16 X 37 inches,
courtesy of the Martha Dunigan Estate and Faye Foster

White bone found
on the grazing:
the rough, porous
language of touch

excerpt from Seamus Heaney's *Bone Dreams I*, from *North*, 1975.

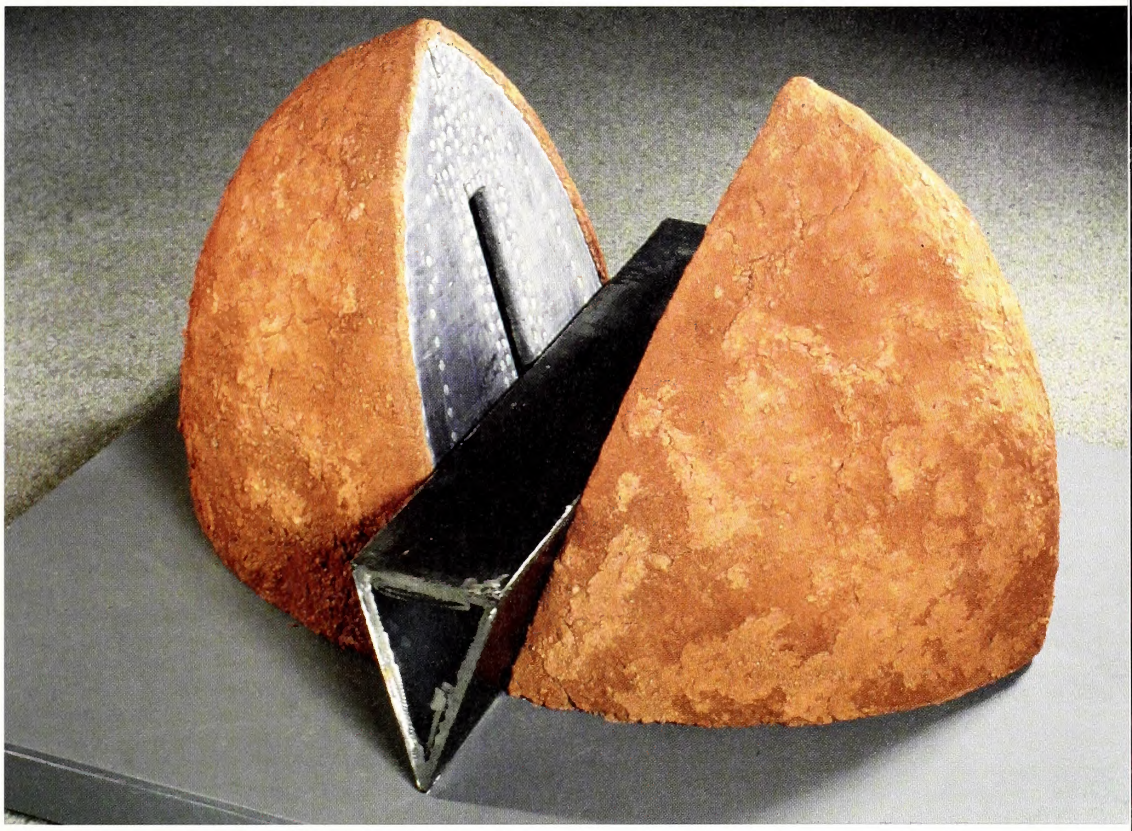
Boat from Wood End, 1988, rock, clay, wood, bone, string, 12 X 22 X 22 inches, courtesy of the Martha Dunigan Estate

Passage

This retrospective exhibition is an opportunity to reflect on the art of Martha Dunigan. It is a rare occasion to have a selection of some of the more significant and seminal works of Dunigan's prolific career assembled together. For some, it is an opportunity to become better acquainted with her life's work. For others, it may be an opportunity to remember. No matter how any of us approach this exhibition, we should take this opportunity to look more closely and try to see in each work, and the body as a whole, something beyond what we think we already know. Although the artist and her art are forever inextricably linked, these individual works of art, the product of Dunigan's lifelong labor and dedication, are, in turn, deserving of our attention in and of themselves. They should be considered on

Island House, 1993, tar paper, papier mâché, red dirt, wax, tar, fabric, string, paper, 18 X 26 X 16 inches,
courtesy of the Martha Dunigan Estate

Mitose, 1994, wood, wire mesh, papier mâché, red dirt, lead, tacks, welded steel, 28 X 56 X 26 inches,
courtesy of the Martha Dunigan Estate



their own merit, on their own terms, and without sentiment, but rather with a high regard for both the art and its maker. It is what any artist would hope for their art.

The works included in this exhibition have been chosen because each, in its own way, represents a passage from the various chapters of Dunigan's career. Some mark a turning point, some carry with them the seeds of an idea that germinate or culminate in later works. It is clear to see common threads that connect these distinct works throughout the decades. And while much has been said about Dunigan's versatility as an artist - she was an accomplished draftsman, printmaker, ceramicist, and sculptor - it is not so much Dunigan's range of skill and technique, or the range of media in which she worked, that should be applauded. Instead, it is the consistency and focus of her intent that deserves respect. While the way she represented or conveyed her subject may have taken various forms early in her career, the underlying intent remained steadfast and became all the more focused as she matured. Beyond mere technical skill and even beyond pure talent, what distinguishes the craftsperson as artist, and ultimately her art from her craft, is not so much the mastery of any specific technique, not only her virtuosity. What distinguishes Dunigan, especially in the later work, is how she eventually negotiated a delicate balance between form and content, between thought and expression, and prudently exercised her understanding and mastery of the visual language in order to convey meaning above all else. This thread courses through even the earliest drawings and prints to the assemblages and very last found

Cannibal's House, 1999, wood, bones, tar paper, tacks, 24 X 12 X 12 inches, courtesy of the Martha Dunigan Estate

object sculpture, from objective representation to metaphor, from allegory to allusion.

Among the themes Dunigan addressed throughout her life's work, there are overt references to literature, mythology and, of course, nature in its myriad forms. But the undercurrent that runs throughout her body of work from the very beginning is deeply personal. For Dunigan the process of making art was a means of self-exploration and revelation. Her art was essentially an extension of her thinking and she seemed to constantly mediate between her inner self and the outer world though this process of making images and objects, as if engaged in a constant dialogue. In fact, many of the forms and motifs that emerge from the works assembled for this exhibition are a direct response to her immediate surroundings, the surroundings that Dunigan returned to again and again throughout her life. Yet although her dialogue is intuitive and personal, her response is expressed in archetypal forms: the boat, the house, the pod, the bones, the stones. Through these archetypes to which she seems to return and unearth in some slight way upon every endeavor, we are able to enter into these images and objects. Ultimately we find that the true subject of the artist's body of work is that of a personal journey, hers, ours, the universal journey, the personal journey, mingled as it is.

This sense of the personal and the universal, the inner and outer, the journey through both, becomes all the more evident considering the body of work as a whole. Upon close inspection, we recognize images of isolation and gathering, concealment and revelation, connection and division, transience and immobility, beginning and end, or perhaps the cycle of all things. Consider the impenetrable leaden structure of *Dusk House*, or *Parable's* wrapped house-like structure concealed in tar. These bodily forms are singular, stoic structures that appear almost confrontational, warding off any trespassers. There is a clearly established boundary between interior and exterior. On the other hand, *Island House*, which appears to once also have tightly concealed its interior under the same wax and tar, has opened to reveal its contents, its tightly wrapped secrets, the personal correspondence of the artist. Belonging to the same series of sculptures, *Guardian* and *Small Cove*, which we were not able to include in this exhibition, reveal this same juxtapositon. *Guardian*, like *Parable* and *Dusk House*, rests firmly on in its pedestal, the house form wrapped, painted in thick, black tar, entrenched and unwelcoming. *Small Cove*, however, appears as a gathering of these same private individuals, reluctant, but communal nonetheless, like the homes of coastal Maine in winter, like people of a rural New England community. Other works, such as *Double Pod* and *Pleiades* take a more organic form, but the theme is recurrent. *Pleiades*, based on the Greek myth of Atlas's seven daughters turned to a cluster of stars, suggests the concealment of the human form in an otherworldly, organic form, whereas *Double Pod* has, like *Island House*, opened. Its contents of the same bound letters spill from its shell, as if seeds of ideas, or seeds of memory. This sense of concealment and revelation is addressed in a more aggressive manner in the later, aptly titled *Mitose*. The cellular form is forcibly split by a steel wedge, divided at its poles to become two distinct, autonomous structures, divorced. In contradiction stands both *Conductor* and *Connection*. *Conductor*, the latter of the two and an appropriate counterpart to *Dusk House*, is also a rigid, self-contained structure with one major difference: a lightning rod reaches from its roof into the air as if trying to make contact.

Skin Boat, 1997, wire armature, fabric, wax, tar, found metal, wood, 12 X 47 X 18 inches, courtesy of the Martha Dunigan Estate

(detail) **Jonah and the Whale,** wood block print, 17 X 29.5 inches, collection of Doug and Bingie Lewis

(detail) **Peter and the Wolf,** wood block print, 13.5 X 14.4 inches, collection of Thorns and Perry Craven

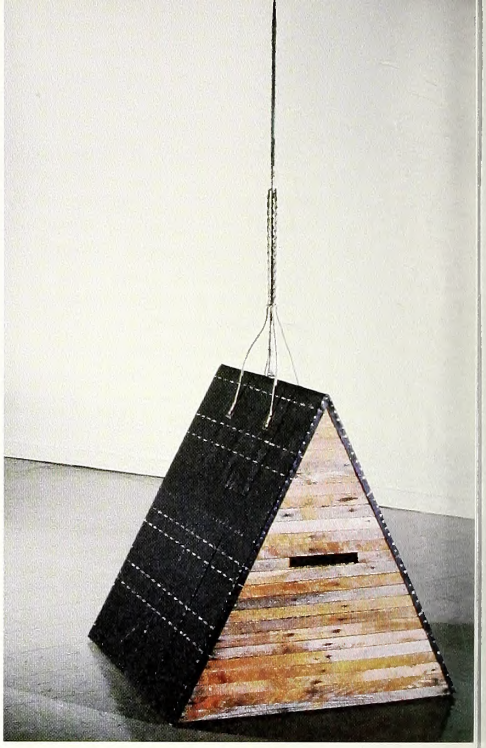
While I have only discussed the sculptural forms to this point, make no mistake, images of concealment and revelation appeared as early as the woodcut prints in which Dunigan used literary sources and fables as the conceit for her subject. In comparison to *Double Pod* or *Pleiades*, consider the editions of the *Pomegranate* or *Pear* prints. The organic forms are split open. We see a cross-section view, not merely a rendering of the surface. Dunigan was, perhaps intuitively, aware of interior and exterior, of containment, of deliberately choosing to reveal or conceal what was hidden within. It is all the more obvious and powerful in works such as *Jonah and the Whale* or *Peter and the Wolf*, where Dunigan cleverly reveals the interior, the gut, the cavity, and the inner being. And what is the underlying theme of the *Canterbury Tales* series but the allegorical journey of Everyman? While Dunigan may have progressed from objective representation such as this to a more metaphorical language, her theme, the deep subject of her work, has stayed with her throughout. The allegorical images of Peter or Jonah and the wrapped letters of *Island House* or *Double Pod* are one in the same, in many ways.

Of course, there are the boats: the vessels, the vehicles of transcendence. The contradictions, the complexities of human nature, the ebb and flow of the human experience are as subtly and masterfully conveyed in these as in any of Dunigan's works. There are boats that have capsized such as *Overturn*. Others seem stranded such as *Boat from Wood End*, or *Early Morning Shadows* and *Dark Tide* which are raised upon wooden pilings. There are boats that clearly impart a sense of metaphysical journey, such as *Skin Boat* and *Dark Tide from Redhead*, that, again, like *Parable* and *Island House*, or almost any one of Dunigan's sculptures, take on a bodily form. Like the whale or the wolf of the aforementioned prints, they carry inside them some-

thing of deeper significance, something of meaning. Sometimes filled with bones, sometimes filled with the wrapped letters, these boats may be thought of as surrogates for the body: the earthly vessel of soul and spirit.

Throughout her life, Dunigan was dedicated to mining the depths of her subconscious as she scavenged the landscape of her surroundings. She uncovered something about herself at every turn, but presented it in such a way that we recognize her journey as being our journey. She conveyed a primal relationship between body and spirit, of the need for connection but with the recurring realization that we can not always bridge the distance between interior and exterior. If her process was a constant search and mediation between the two, then the objects themselves – the houses, the pods, the boats, the birdhouses – became repositories for what she discovered along the way. In the scope of this retrospective exhibition, it may be clearer to comprehend Dunigan's development as an artist. It is my hope that a broader view of the artist's career will enable us to consider her life's work in the broader context of contemporary art. In many ways, these selected works connect Dunigan to the art and artists of her generation and, no matter how deeply personal, reflect the underlying concerns of her generation as a whole.

Douglas Bohr
Associate Curator



(right) **Conductor,** 1991, wood, tar paper, tacks, lightning rod, 90 X 36 X 36 inches, courtesy of the Martha Dunigan Estate

(left) **Dusk House,** 1991, wood, lead, tacks, tar, string, fabric, 15.5 X 15.5 X 66 inches, courtesy of the Martha Dunigan Estate

SECCA would like to thank the following people whose generosity and support of Martha Dunigan and SECCA made this exhibition possible. First, we are extremely grateful to the many collectors whom we called upon and/or visited over the past months: Donna Burke and Cashin Hunt (NC); Mary Blackwell-Chapman, (NC); Thorns and Perry Craven (NC); Richard Di Frummolo and Donald Winter (NY); A.C. Dollar (NC); Clyde M. Fowler (NC); Faye Foster (NC); Gerald Freedman (NC); Walter Gray (NC); Mary Goslen (NC); Jesse Goslen (NC); Copey Hanes (NC); Charlotte and Phil Hanes (NC); Rosemary Harris and John Ehle (NC); Virginia S. Ingram (NC); Lea Lackey-Zachmann (NC); Margot Lynch (NC); Bingle and Doug Lewis (NC); Dorothy Miller and Dan Klubock (MA); Leonard and Beverly Noyes (NC); Ron and Tamara Propst (NC); Mark Protosevich (MA); Seth Rader (NC); Alix Ritchie and Marty Davis (MA); Ben and Mimi Rouzie (NC); Anne Kesler Shields (NC); Joseph Sauser and Nancy Dawson-Sauser (NC); Bill and Sylvia Tribby (NC); Berta Walker (MA); and the North Carolina Dance Theatre Company. To many of you whom I had the pleasure to visit, I am especially grateful. Your stories and anecdotes about Martha gave me greater perspective and helped inform my approach to the exhibition in general. I want to thank you personally for your warmth and willingness to share with me something and someone so dear to you.

We also want to thank those who contributed to the catalog: Peter Norall; Clyde M. Fowler; Copey Hanes; Helmuth F. and Leanne W. Vollger; McDonald Bane; Robert and Ellen Knott; Martin and Donna Rader; Patricia W. Toole; Diane R. Berg; Robert M. Beseda; Rachel Brown; Gerald Freedman; Mary R. Kerr; Bob Kopf; Bingle and Doug Lewis; Anne Kesler Shields and Pam S. Chapklin-Griffin.

In addition, there have been many people who have helped in various way to organize this exhibition. For their organization of the *Martha Dunigan Memorial Exhibition* at Artworks Gallery this past fall, particularly their tenacious detective work to locate and contact collectors throughout North Carolina, we are indebted to Lee Hansley of Lee Hansley Gallery, Raleigh, NC, and McDonald Bane. SECCA's exhibition would have proven much more difficult an undertaking without the extensive lists and clues they provided. We also want to thank Doug Singleton of the North Carolina Dance Theatre Company; Patrice Slattery, archivist at the North Carolina School of the Arts; Artworks Gallery, Winston-Salem, NC; Berta Walker Gallery, Provincetown, MA; North Carolina School of the Arts; and the estate of Martha Dunigan for their assistance.

Lastly, SECCA wishes to express their gratitude to the Dunigan family: her daughters, Orin, Seanad and Breon Dunigan, Bob Bailey, and both Liam and Max. Beyond this, I personally want to thank Bob and Breon who have been actively involved from start to finish. Your commitment, generosity and support have been constant. I cannot thank you enough. I sincerely hope that this exhibition presents Martha's work in a manner befitting her approach to and passion for her art.

DB

Martha Dunigan *Passage*

Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art
May 4 - July 7, 2002

This exhibition was organized by SECCA
Catalog design, Bryan Ellis

Biographical

Martha Dunigan

Born March 22, 1934, Provincetown, MA

Education:

Oberlin College, Ohio, B.A, 1956
Pratt Graphic Center, NY, 1956-58
Atelier 17, Paris, 1957
Penland School of Crafts, Penland, NC, 1966-67, 1970-72
University of North Carolina at Greensboro, M.F.A., 1974

Employment:

1974-2000	North Carolina School of the Arts, Winston-Salem, NC
1992-93	Truro Center for the Arts, Truro, MA, Sculpture Workshops
1989	Penland School of Crafts, Penland, NC, Summer Session IV
1973-79	Truro Center for the Arts, Truro, MA, Summer Sessions
1966-75	Arts and Crafts Association, Winston-Salem, NC

Grants and Awards:

1997	Award for Teaching Excellence, North Carolina School of the Arts
1994	Artist of the Year Award, Sawtooth Center for Visual Art
1988-89	SECCA/RJR Southeastern Artists Fellowship, Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art
1988	Emerging Artist Grant, Winston-Salem Arts Council
1984	Mellon Grant (for leave of absence), North Carolina School of the Arts

Select Exhibitions:

2000	*Generations*, Sawtooth Center for Visual Art, Winston-Salem, NC
	Return of The Native, Berta Walker Gallery, Provincetown, MA
	Artworks Gallery, Winston-Salem, NC
1999	*Juried Sculpture Exhibit*, Artspace, Raleigh, NC
1998	*Solo Exhibition*, Artworks Gallery, Winston-Salem, NC
	XV Invitational, Randolph County Arts Council, Asheboro, NC
1997	*Martha Dunigan and Nancy Whorf*, Berta Walker Gallery, Provincetown, MA
	Triad Artists, Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, NC
	Martha Dunigan and Kate Magruder, Artworks Gallery, Winston-Salem, NC
1996	*North Carolina-Barbados Exchange Exhibition*, Artspace, Raleigh, NC
1995	*Martha Dunigan and Alix Hitchcock*, Artworks Gallery, Winston-Salem, NC
1994	*Women Artists of North Carolina*, Winston-Salem Area, Meredith College, Raleigh, NC
	Artist of the Year Exhibition, Milton Rhodes Gallery, Sawtooth Center for Visual Art, Winston-Salem, NC
1993	Berta Walker Gallery, Provincetown, MA
	Exhibition 280: Works Off Walls, Huntington Museum of Art, Huntington, VA
	Twenty-First Annual Competition for North Carolina Artists, Fayetteville Museum of Art, Fayetteville, NC
1992	*Tri-State Sculptors* (Exhibition and Conference), Asheville, NC
	Martha Dunigan and Alix Hitchcock, Artworks Gallery, Winston-Salem, NC
1991	*Piedmont Craftsmen at the Theatre Art Galleries/Martha Dunigan*, High Point, NC
	Seascapes, Maine Coast Artists Gallery, Rockport, ME
	Tri-State Sculptors (Exhibition and Conference), Appalachian State University, Boone, NC
	Martha Dunigan and Beverly Noyes, Artworks Gallery, Winston-Salem, NC
1990	Berta Walker Gallery, Provincetown, MA

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Martha Dunigan *Passage* is underwritten in part by corporate contributions from BB&T and Lowes Food Stores.

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Voyages of the Modern Imagination: The Boat in 20th Century American Art, Farnsworth Art Museum, Rockland, ME
Landmarks: An Outdoor Exhibition of Sculpture by Members of Tri-State Sculptors Guild, Strathmore Hall Arts Center, Rockville, MD

1989 *Art on Paper 1989*, Weatherspoon Gallery, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC
Martha Dunigan and Mitzi Shewmake, Artworks Gallery, Winston-Salem, NC
Tri-State Sculptors (Exhibition and Conference), Elon College, NC
Southeast Seven 12, Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, NC

Exhibited in numerous additional group shows with *The Five Winston-Salem Printmakers* since 1970 throughout North Carolina and neighboring states.

Exhibited annually since 1984 in group shows with Artworks Gallery, Inc., Winston-Salem, NC

Exhibited in juried, invitational and members' shows in the Provincetown Art Association, MA, in recent years.

Represented by the Berta Walker Gallery, Provincetown, MA

Publications:

1994 Martha Dunigan, *Artist of the Year* (catalog), Sawtooth Center for Visual Art, Winston-Salem, NC
Southeast Seven 12 (catalog), Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, NC

1989 Redd, Chris: "The Concealed and the Revealed: An Interview with Martha Dunigan," *Arts Journal*

1985 *Paperworks, An Exhibition of Handmade Paper by North Carolina Papermakers* Catalog, *Paperworks* Exhibit, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC

1984 Shewmake, Mitzi: "Five Winston-Salem Printmakers," *Woman's Art Journal*, Spring/Summer

1983 *Five Winston-Salem Printmakers* (catalog), Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, NC

1979 *Papermaking and Paper Using* (catalog), Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, NC

Exhibiting Member:

Artworks Gallery, Inc.
Five Winston-Salem Printmakers
Piedmont Craftsmen, Inc.
Provincetown Art Association
Tri-State Sculptors, Inc.

Select Collections:

Barclay's American Business Credit, Greensboro, NC
Graylyn Conference Center, Winston-Salem, NC
Jackson Library, University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Mandala Center, Winston-Salem, NC
Wachovia Bank and Trust, N.A., Winston-Salem, NC
Wake Forest University English Department, Winston-Salem, NC
Many Private Collections

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